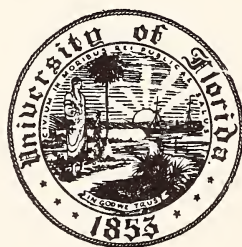


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HOW TO CHOOSE A CAMP FOR YOUR CHILD

BY ERNEST OSBORNE

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HOW TO CHOOSE A CAMP FOR YOUR CHILD

BY ERNEST OSBORNE

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THIS past summer, next summer, and in the years ahead, between six and eight million American youngsters will be going to camp. Should yours be one of them? Before you make a decision that might be regretted, ask yourself these questions:

“Just what can a youngster get from camp that he could not get at home?”

“What do those in charge of a camp think are the most important things the experience can contribute to a boy or girl?”

“What are some of the basic differences in the ways in which camps are organized and run?”

“How can I tell whether a camp is a good one or not?”

“What factors shall I take into account in trying to decide whether one camp or another is best suited to what I hope my child will get from the summer?”

At present there is no center or service which can enable parents to arrive at satisfactory answers to these and other important questions which should be asked before a decision about a camp for Junior is reached.

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Two magazines, at least, provide reasonably satisfactory service. Parents Magazine and Redbook have competent staff people who visit and evaluate camps they recommend. By and large, their advice seems to be unbiased, as does that of the *New York Times* and *Herald-Tribune*.

The American Camping Association (*Hugh Ransom, Executive Director, Bradford Woods, Martinsville, Indiana*) also provides an information service about camps in different parts of the country. Various articles are available in which standards for camping are discussed. But most parents do not want to rely exclusively on this or commercially sponsored services. They want to take responsibility themselves for getting an accurate picture of what a camp offers.

One way of going about this is to find out from other parents whose children have gone to a particular camp what seems to be its strengths and weaknesses. Children, too, can get from their friends some idea of the kind of things that go on in the camps the latter have attended. In addition to discussions with the director of the camp that is being considered, it is well to attend any camp reunion that may be held during the winter or spring months. Often one can get a "feel" of the camp from observing the things that are discussed at such a reunion and the kind of relationship that seems to exist between children and members of the camp staff.

what camping can do for your child

Before suggesting ways to discover whether or not a given camp will provide the kind of experience you hope your child will have, let us take a look at the values camping may have to offer your children.

Except for conditions affecting health and safety, few efforts have been made to standardize camping practices. Each camp director is pretty much a law unto himself. While such lack of uniformity means that camping isn't likely to settle into a rut, it also makes for such variety that it is not easy to be sure just what is going on.

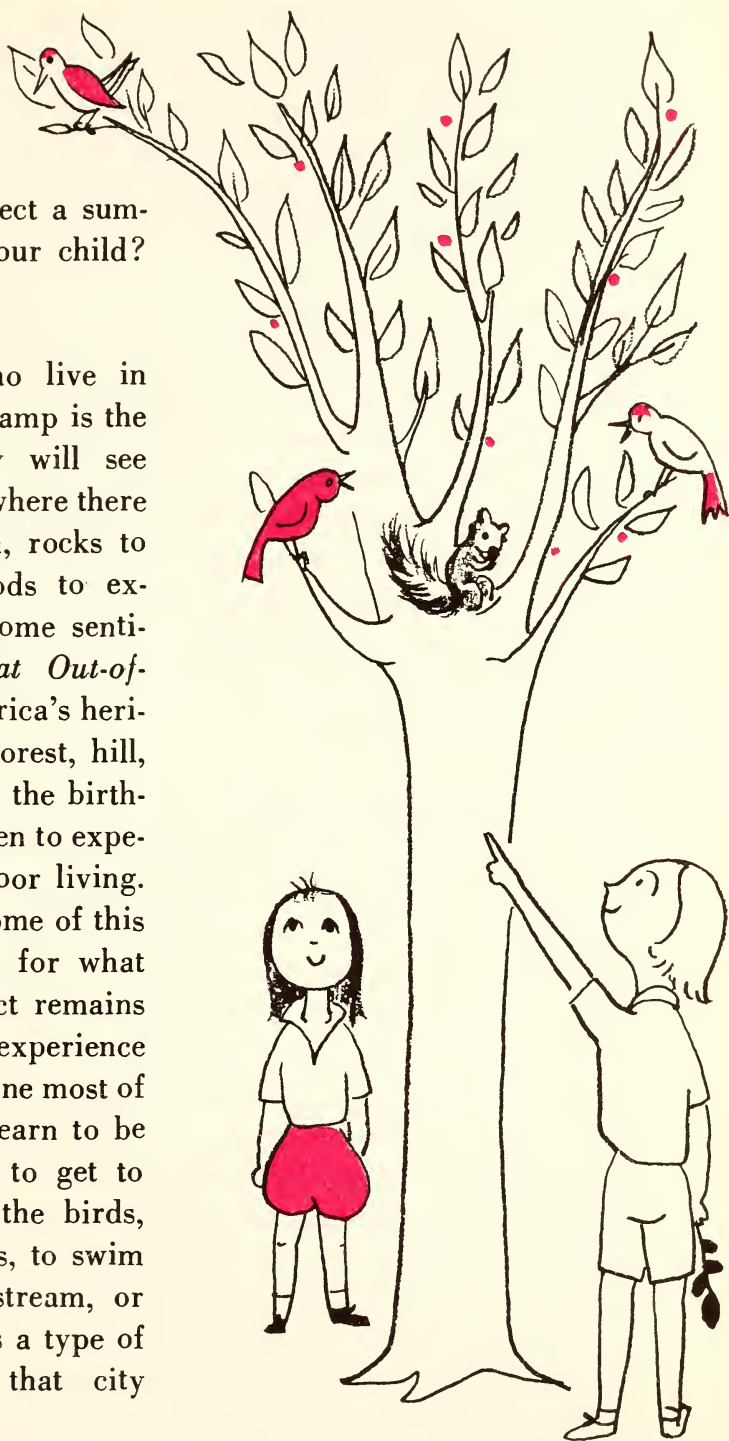
Yet with all this variety, certain patterns of camping have developed. Later, we shall try to spot these and point out the strengths and weaknesses of various emphases. But, first, what are the things

you can reasonably expect a summer camp to give to your child?

Outdoor living

For many children who live in city, town, or suburbs, camp is the only place where they will see more trees than people, where there will be grass to run on, rocks to clamber over, and woods to explore. It is easy to become sentimental about the *Great Out-of-Doors* and say that America's heritage may be found in forest, hill, and plain, and that it is the birthright of American children to experience the value of outdoor living.

Even if we discount some of this sentimental yearning for what can be no more, the fact remains that in a camp, children experience a life different from the one most of them lead in town. To learn to be comfortable on a hike, to get to know something about the birds, the bees, and the flowers, to swim in a lake, wade in a stream, or climb a mountain brings a type of satisfaction in living that city streets cannot provide.



Such experiences build a foundation for continued pleasure in outdoor recreation. Indeed, it is the rare adult who enjoys outdoor recreation unless he has experienced outdoor living in his childhood and youth. In future years, when recreation will presumably take more and more of our total time, it will be good to have these experiences in one's background.

learning new skills

Many of the skills children learn at camp are ones they are unlikely to learn anywhere else. They may learn to swim at school or at the municipal swimming pool, but they will probably not have a chance outside camp to row, paddle, or sail a boat. Team games are commonplace in school but there are fewer opportunities to learn the individual skills of tennis, archery, and riflery than in camp. Nature study is a "natural" in the camp situation. Building a fire, cooking a meal, making a place to sleep out of doors have immediate usefulness in physical comfort and long-run satisfactions in the discovery of one's own abilities.

being on one's own

This latter point deserves considerable emphasis. Unlike their parents and grandparents, today's children have few natural opportunities to experience the deep satisfaction that comes from being able to take care of themselves, to be on their own. To discover that they can do a pretty good job of preparing their own food, can meet such crises as a sudden rainstorm and protect themselves, and in a variety of other ways are not completely dependent on grown-ups helps them develop a feeling of confidence which may well carry over into other areas. This feeling about one's self is coming more and more to be recognized as basic to good adjustment. The camp staff that is aware of the importance of youngsters' building such feelings about themselves can provide in the camp setting all sorts of opportunities for so doing.

Some years ago a boy or girl was likely to grow up with four, five, or six other brothers and sisters not too far apart in age

Today's smaller families and the greater spacing that is common make the family less able to supply give-and-take experiences with age mates. The cabin or bunk group is the child's family while he is away at camp. In it, he will learn how to take account of other's interests and needs. Through group projects and activities, he will discover his own abilities and the things which he needs to improve.

getting on with one's age mates

Lasting friendships, too, are more likely to develop in such a setting than in the more impersonal school situation. Children learn to know themselves through the eyes of others and to learn something of the varying attitudes of boys and girls from other homes.

For an only child, especially, the "home life" of the cabin group can mean much. But camping can supply other experiences which may be lacking in the youngster's own family. The boy, for instance, who has no sisters may well find in a co-educational camp, experiences which help him know members of the opposite sex in much the same way that his friend who has sisters is learning to know about girls. The same, of course, would be true of girls with no brothers.

The boy who has only sisters (or the girl with only brothers) may find in camp a kind of companionship with those of his own sex which his particular family set-up denies him.

Similarly, if there are considerable age differences among children in the family, a camp experience with children of their own age may be particularly valuable for youngsters. The older ones learn to compete with others of their own age, size, and ability. The younger ones have a chance to emerge from under the shadow of older brothers and sisters.

There may be some truth in the charge that many children are sent to camp to get them off parents' hands during the summer months. Perhaps that isn't as bad as it seems. It is too easily assumed that such children are rejected children, ones who aren't loved, who are primarily a nuisance to their parents.

But this need not be the case. It may well be that there are no children of the youngster's age in the neighborhood for him to play

with. Or it isn't possible for the family as a group to get out of the city for a family holiday. Sometimes, too, both parents are working and Junior would be far better off in a good camp than he would be under the care of a full-time "baby-sitter."

Other children may have problems of social adjustment of a more specific sort. The overly-dependent child who doesn't feel happy away from mother may find a new kind of independence in a well-selected camp. The self-centered youngster whose lack of experience with other children accounts largely for his difficulty can learn in camp to think of others as well as of himself.

An increasing number of camp people stress these group-experience values in promoting their camps. Unfortunately, the camps vary greatly in providing such experience, and promotion folders do not always square with reality. Later, as we look at some of the specific details with respect to camp programs and practices, ways will be suggested whereby one can be reasonably confident of the reality (or its lack) of the group-relationship emphasis.

getting to know other adults

Before moving on to an examination of the varied program emphases one finds in summer camping, it is well to mention one other possible contribution the camp experience can make to a growing boy or girl and his family. Even in those families where both parents are actively and wholesomely in the picture, there is real advantage in the child getting to know other adults intimately. In most American families today, there is little opportunity for children to have close contacts with uncles, aunts, grandparents, or any grown-ups other than their parents. In such a situation, it is altogether likely that they will develop a provincial attitude, a feeling that the only right way of thinking and acting is that which they see in their own homes. To discover that there are other adults who have different ideas, different ways of doing things, but who are still fine people, is a valuable experience.

Similarly, the perspective gained by close association with men and women other than their parents may well lead to a deeper appre-

ciation of the parents. Absence may well contribute toward a more realistic understanding.

Let us be a little more direct and frank about this point of the value of children having intimate contacts with other adults. Quite naturally, we, as their parents, have a strong personal emotional stake in what they do and say. We cannot be as objective as might be desirable in situations where, for instance, a child may miss an overnight camping trip because he has been lackadaisical in preparing himself to take part in it. The well-trained counsellor can more easily leave the responsibility up to the child not because he is indifferent to him but because he is not so personally involved. He is less likely to feel that the child's failure is a personal reflection on him.

Likewise, in little things of everyday living such as brushing teeth regularly, spilling things at the table, not hanging up clothes, and in matters of courtesy, the non-parent adult can play his role as counsellor and guide with less possibility of making a personal issue of the thing. Such an adult can more easily help the child to learn that these things are up to him, that he is the one that should care about them.

camp is not for some

At this point a warning note may well be sounded. Granted that for most children, a camping experience can have much to contribute, the fact still remains that for some, camping is not "what the doctor orders." There is a real question, for instance, as to the advisability of youngsters under six going to camp unless the family situation necessitates it. There are children, too, who would be badly overstimulated by most camp experiences.

The child who feels he is not wanted by his parents could well believe that being sent to camp was just another indication of this. A happy summer with his folks would be much preferable to a summer away at camp.

Certain youngsters, too, may have interests which they can follow more satisfactorily outside of a camp. If, along with this, there are

opportunities for satisfying contacts with other children in the neighborhood, the values of camping may be less significant for them than for the majority of boys and girls.

But such situations, important as they are, are the exceptional ones. For most children, a summer or two of camp, at the least, will be a gratifying and worthwhile experience.

readiness for camping

Even those children for whom a camping experience seems desirable can profit by being helped to "ready" themselves for the summer.

First of all, they should be included in the business of selecting a camp. Their feeling about the director as a person is important. The fact that friends are going to be at a particular camp should also be taken into account.

As with other kinds of new experiences, anything that can be done to give the youngster some feeling for what he will experience at camp is a good idea. If it is possible to take him on a visit to the camp property, this can well be done. Opportunities to see movies of camps, to talk with children who have been to camp, are good, too.

In addition there are some children's stories with a camp setting. A chance to read these may be helpful. One little book written for children by Helen Beck and titled *Going to Camp* (Stephen-Day Press, New York, \$1.95) does a good job of discussing the experiences that the prospective camper can expect and some of the things he can do to get ready to have a good time.

If a child has never been away from home, it may be a good idea to provide some experiences of visiting friends for an overnight stay or in other ways to pave the road for being away from home. In addition, the contagion of parents' enthusiasm for what he will find at camp will help to assure him a good time when once he arrives.

characteristic camp set-ups

Classifying camps by types, such as traditional or modern, presents real difficulties. The variations in philosophy and practice defy any clear-cut differentiations. In addition, anyone who makes such an

attempt out of his own camping experience has almost certainly developed certain points of view which make it difficult for him to be completely unbiased. Yet some classification is necessary to help parents in selecting a camp for their children.

Most of those closely associated with the camping movement would agree that it is possible to separate traditional or conservative camping practices from progressive or liberal ones. Naturally most camps don't fall at one extreme or the other but somewhere in between. With these reservations clearly in mind, then, let us take a broad look at what is to be found in the organized summer camp today.

traditional camps

The traditional camp, sometimes called the regimented camp by its critics, is usually carefully planned and organized. Of some it is said that the director knows months before camp opens what activities will be scheduled each hour throughout the summer. Comparatively little choice is given campers in the selection of activities, for it is believed that a well-rounded, adult-chosen series of experiences is best for youngsters.

In many such camps there is a heavy emphasis on athletic activities though usually a sprinkling of crafts, music, nature study, and other such experiences is included. For the most part, competition between individuals and groups is stressed. The competitive activity is often fitted into a system of awards in which emblems of one kind or another are given for specific achievements.

The following scheme is representative of such systems: Varicolored felt arrows which may be sewn on the camp shirt are used to mark the individual youngster's success in learning the names of ten trees, being on the winning baseball team, doing his part in the cabin clean-up each week, participating in the week-end camp show, winning his event in the water regatta, and so on. A specified number of green arrows may be exchanged for a red one, red ones for a black one and eventually, if a large enough number of black ones are won, the camper is awarded the coveted gold arrow which signifies top achievement.

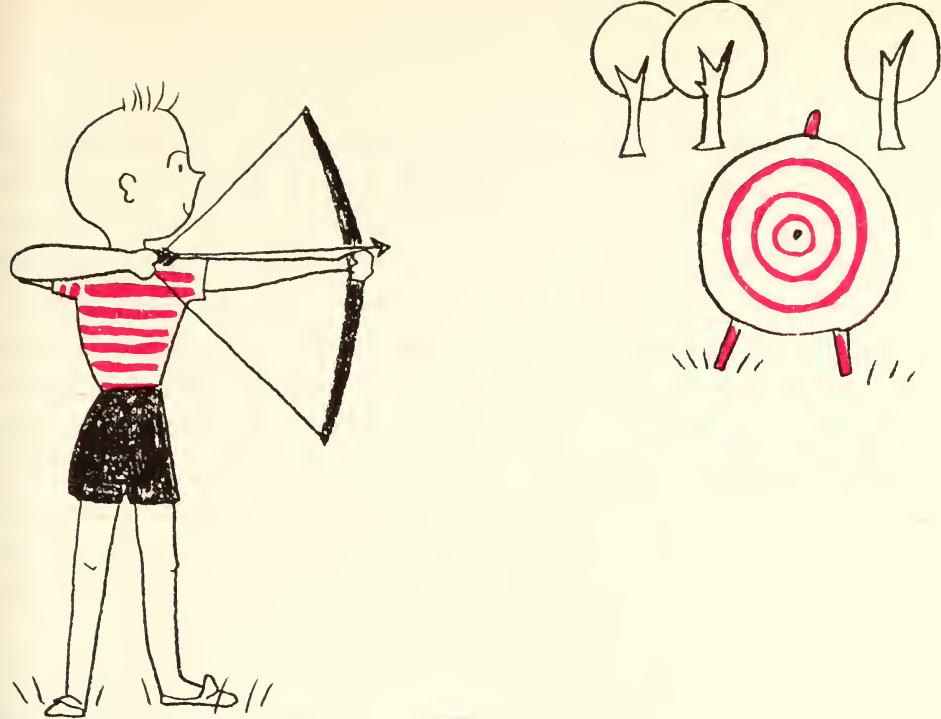
In a camp where such an individual award system is used to encourage participation in activities and to give recognition to achievement, the whole camp may be organized into competitive teams. These are often designated by the names of colors, Indian tribes, or wild animals. In some camps the team emphasis is confined to a relatively short period during which all activities are on a team basis. In others, the team approach is used throughout the summer.

non-traditional camps

The progressive or non-traditional camp is organized very differently. Indeed, its critics tend to feel that there is little if any organization. Those in charge of the program believe that only a minimum of activities should be scheduled before camp opens. In place of assigning children to a variety of activities in which they must participate, whether they find them interesting or not, various methods are used to afford free choice. If, however, individual youngsters seem to be concentrating too much on certain things, attempts are made to encourage them to participate in a wider variety through methods other than assignment.

While athletics usually have an important place in the camp program, they are not likely to be the dominating activity. And, for the most part, they are more informal and less highly competitive. Competition between individuals and groups is played down and efforts are made to help children find satisfaction in activities for their own sake, for the fun and satisfaction involved rather than for the garnering of concrete award symbols. Rarely are campers organized into continuing teams which compete in athletics or in other activities.

Much emphasis is put on encouraging children to help in deciding what the camp program shall include, although a few activities—like swimming—may be regularly scheduled. In smaller camps, a kind of town meeting may be held each morning after breakfast. During this meeting excursions or hikes may be planned—one to a nearby beaver dam, another to the top of the nearest hill or mountain. Others in the camp will decide they want a morning of baseball and enlist the



participation of some of their fellow campers. Two youngsters decide that they want to build a hut in the woods near camp and get one of the counsellors who is free to give them a hand in planning and starting construction.

Craft shops and the nature cabin are manned by counsellors with appropriate skills but campers are not assigned to a certain number of days or weeks in these activities. Rather they come and go as their interests dictate. Dramatic activities and campfire programs tend to be more informal and spontaneous than in the traditional camp where much time may be spent in rehearsing the activity.

choosing the most suitable type

These brief descriptions of the two major emphases found in organized camping perhaps set the stage for an understanding of essential differences in philosophy and practice. The first would seem to assume that adult heads are wiser, that children are not capable of choosing activities intelligently, that exposure through scheduling to a variety of activities is the sounder approach and that to obtain active participation it is necessary to set up a system of awards and competition.

The second takes a different tack in its approach to programming. It apparently believes that while adults have their part in setting the stage for activities, children themselves can be counted on to make good choices, with guidance, about what is good and satisfying for them. Instead of adult assignment to activity, it counts on understanding counselling and guidance as a means of assuring that youngsters do not get into an activity rut. Nor do the non-traditional camp director and his associates believe that awards and competition are necessary to enlist participation. Rather, it is felt that intrinsic interest in the activities themselves is enough. More than this, there is the conviction that when an award system is used, the emphasis is far more likely to be on the accumulation of awards than on the development of genuine interest in the activities themselves.

Which kind of camp will be more appropriate for your child depends on a number of things. Some youngsters seem to thrive on competition. Zest for the activity is given by the chance to compare themselves with the achievement of fellow campers. Others find the competitive atmosphere defeating, particularly if their physical abilities are not as great as those of the average child nor their temperament as aggressive. And while numbers of boys and girls are positively stimulated by competition, many are worn down by it and are thrown into a generally unhappy or uneasy frame of mind.

There are other individual differences that would seem to make one type of camp program or another better fitted to a child. At first, at least, the youngster who at home and school has had little experience in making choices may find the more informal camp program very frustrating. He is more comfortable in being assigned to activities. If left at all to his own devices, he is lost and unhappy. He may need to keep busy every minute and finds leisure time hard to take. The exact opposite may be true for other children who fret against coercion no matter how it may appear. They may need to move at a slower tempo than the highly organized camp permits. They find deeper satisfaction in the more informal, less complicated pursuits.

But the broad look is not enough. The parent who wishes to be as conscientious as possible in selecting a camp for his child will want

a more detailed interpretation not only of the significance of some of the camp practices already mentioned but also of other matters pertinent in helping him decide what sort of camping experience is likely to be best for his particular child. In the next half dozen pages or so let us look at a number of the points which are important in getting a more concrete picture of life at camp.

an organized program or an informal one?

As has already been suggested, whether or not one chooses a camp with a highly organized or a more informal program emphasis depends largely on what is believed to be necessary and good for children. If it is sincerely felt that youngsters of the school age period need to be rather closely directed if they are to get most from their experience, the camp that has a carefully scheduled program, which sees to it that every camper takes part regularly in a series of activities, will be the choice. Some campers may develop real interest in activities to which they are assigned but which they would not have elected had they had free choice. On the other hand, lasting distaste may well be developed by others just as enforced piano lessons frequently result in a dislike for music.

Those who favor the informal type of camp program have definite reasons for their stand. They feel that it is important for youngsters to learn to make choices. They are also impressed by the findings of psychologists that learning takes place most effectively when there is "readiness" or a positive feeling toward that which is being learned. Believing in children learning to work together, they find in the less formal activities the best arena for such learning.

It should be emphasized that except in the unusually "free" camp, definite attempts are made to make sure that youngsters do participate in a variety of activities. The difference in approach is one that attempts to see to it that this participation comes from interest rather than from an arbitrary assignment. Understandably, with such an approach there is not the degree of assurance that each and every youngster will take part in a desirable variety of activities. The assignment method is more "efficient" from this point of view. The

value of the more flexible method, however, is that participation much more likely to be on the basis of genuine interest.

competition and awards

Camp directors and others who favor the use of a system of awards and stress competition assert that they are only being realistic. They point out that life itself, in America at least, is highly competitive and that individual merit and achievement are concretely awarded. To them (and to many parents) the best preparation for a competitive world is to practice competition.

Some of them insist that without the stimulus of competition, many youngsters would settle back into a state of lethargy and spend the bulk of their time reading comics, lying in their bunks, and otherwise doing nothing. And they can cite individual instances of such behavior to support their point. It should be noted, however, that many youngsters who require such a stimulus have never been in a situation where this type of motivation was not present. They have

rarely had the experience of enjoying something for its own sake.

Those in the camp field who minimize competition and dispense with concrete awards believe that in the normal course of childhood living there is more than enough competition. They feel that many youngsters need to experience the satisfaction of activity for its own sake. They would hope that children in camp would come to appreciate and enjoy the beauty of working without the crutch of working for a green felt arrow. They would like campers to enjoy playing a game whether or not they are on the winning team.



While it is generally true that competition stimulates much activity, there is a question as to the desirability of this. Many students of child-life, both amateur and professional, believe that growing youngsters need a good deal more relaxation than they are likely to get. They feel that there are values in a kind of creative loafing, that there is nothing particularly good about keeping on the go every minute of the day. Camp people in the progressive or less highly-scheduled camps try to arrange things so that campers have considerable free time to do as they wish.

Here again, then, as a parent you must decide what sort of a pattern of life you want for your child. There are merits in each. For some children, a degree of competition, a few awards may provide the scaffolding which seems useful in preparing for life. But one must be sure that the scaffolding does not become more important than the building itself.

the specialized camp

Though for the most part, camps for the seven or eight to thirteen or fourteen year old boy and girl provide a balance of activities, there are camps which stress one or a few. Most camp directors, whether of the more traditional stripe or of a non-traditional persuasion, agree that variety of activities is desirable for younger children. In spite of this, however, certain activities—usually athletics—are given so much attention that crafts, art, nature study, and the other things included in most camp programs are pushed into the background. For the athletically inclined youngster this may not be so bad though he is deprived of the opportunity for developing additional interests. But for the youngster who is not the athletic type, life at such a camp can be pretty miserable. In spite of the fact that activities in which he is interested and proficient are scheduled he senses that camp staff and fellow campers consider the non-athletic youngster a bit peculiar. And this is especially true if his interests focus on something like nature study. Those parents who would like their youngsters to experience a variety of activities should check to see that such activities not only are scheduled but really encouraged.

For the teen-agers particularly, the specialized interest camp may have much to offer. This is true especially if they have had a number of years of camp experience and have participated in a rounded program. All too often, camps for older children continue to require that all campers take part in all or most activities. If youngsters of thirteen to sixteen or seventeen years of age have developed, through camp and other experiences, specialized interests in camp-craft, arts and crafts, dramatics, music, and the like, there are good reasons to afford them the opportunity of concentrating on a special interest or interests. A number of camps, including the National Girl Scout Camp (for older girls), have experimented successfully in the past with programs which made it possible for campers to spend a number of hours per day in those activities which interested them most.

Among the more common kinds of specialization offered by summer camps are: riding, sailing, music, language, woodcraft, nature, and athletics, of course. Such camps are usually staffed with people particularly skilled in the activity stressed by the camp. For the youngsters with a deep and abiding interest, they provide a fine experience.



work camps and work experience

The work camp is a relatively recent development in the camping field which would seem to deserve special attention. In recent years, a number of schools and such organizations as the American Friends'

Service Committee have sponsored work camps. During the war when there was a shortage of agricultural labor, some of the states organized work camps to assist with crops.

These work camps are usually planned for young people of high school or college age. In addition to the concrete contribution they may make to community needs (Friends' camps, for instance, concentrate on helping deprived communities build community buildings, churches, or playgrounds), the sense of worthwhileness in activity is believed to be an important factor of the work experience. It has already been pointed out that the nature of our society today makes it hard for young people to gear themselves into neighborhood or community activity in meaningful ways.

For older youngsters, then, and especially for those who have had a number of years of organized camp experience, the work camp has much to offer. But all camps can, if they will, provide constructive work experiences. It is usually expected that campers will take responsibility for taking care of their own clothing and other possessions and for maintaining their living quarters in both a livable and attractive condition. If these procedures are organized so that the individual and the group feel and carry out the responsibility largely without close adult supervision, a real contribution can be made to their feeling about work.

Other work which is for the good of all, rather than only for the camper himself, can also be made available. Such things as setting up and waiting on tables, brush-clearing projects around camp, designing and building camp trails, walls, shelters, and the like, can be challenging learning experiences.

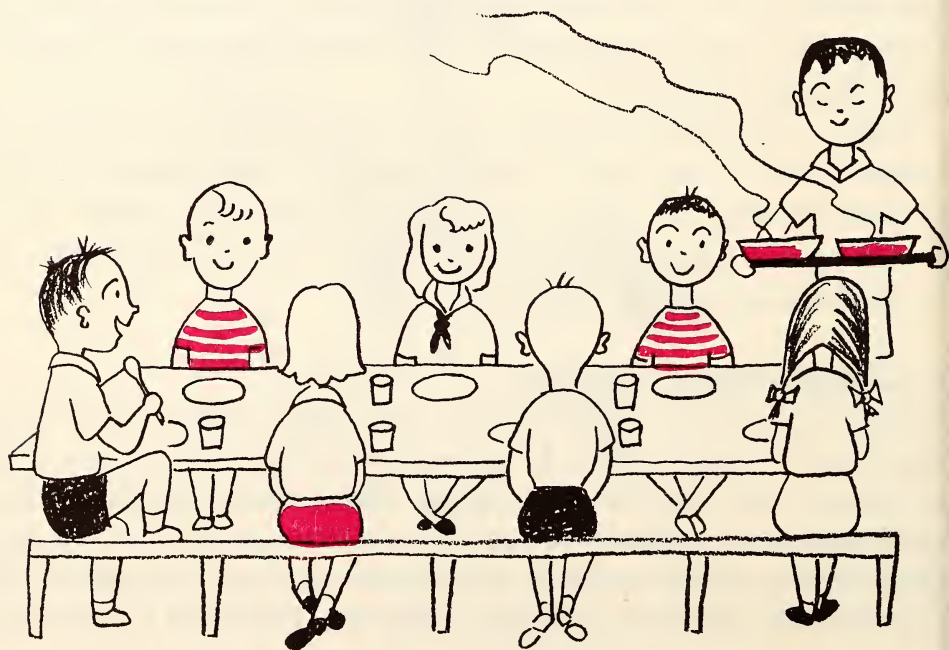
co-educational camps

Until comparatively recently, there were few co-educational camps deserving the name. There have been for many years, camps which are better called brother-sister camps. These camps usually maintain quite separate programs though they are located near one another. Some of the special events such as Saturday night campfires, "big" social events, and now and again, a selected number of regular camp

activities are available for boys and girls together. But the day-by-day contacts in all camp functions which characterize truly co-educational camps are largely absent.

Among camp leaders as well as parents, the co-educational camp has been a center of controversy. For more than a quarter of a century, there has been major opposition by those who run sex-segregated camps. Now the tide seems to have turned, largely because those co-educational camps that have been running for years have demonstrated that most of the reservations and fears held by adults are groundless.

It has already been suggested that the co-educational camp has a contribution to make to the social development of boys and girls who do not in their families have the opportunity for daily contacts with members of the opposite sex. But in more general ways, too, there would seem to be merit in the co-educational approach. For boys and girls, men and women, have to learn to live together. As our pattern for the relationships between the sexes in marriage and in community



life is becoming one characterized by companionship and co-operation, the preparation that co-educational camping can offer is getting more attention.

Again, however, things are not always what they seem. A parent considering the possibility of co-educational camp experience for son or daughter needs to check very carefully on how the program is organized and administered. Some camps enrolling both boys and girls provide very little joint activity. In others, the fear that something unwholesome may develop between youngsters leads to an overly-cautious type of supervision that in itself engenders unhealthy attitudes of boys and girls toward one another. If one senses that either or both of these emphases are in the picture and is unable to locate a co-educational camp where healthier attitudes would seem to prevail, it may be better to send the youngster to a camp where only those of his own sex are enrolled. For if boys and girls feel that they are not trusted, that the camp staff expects the "worst," if they are kept from playing and working together in a whole-hearted way, they can hardly be expected to develop healthy attitudes toward the opposite sex.

interfaith and interracial camps

For parents who wish their children to learn to know other youngsters of different backgrounds, the camp set-up offers an arena where those of different racial and religious backgrounds, of different social and economic levels, can live, work, and play together under ideal circumstances. For the camp, more than the school or other community agency, is a little community in itself, relatively untouched by the influences that might make such interrelationships difficult.

Increasingly, camps sponsored by organizations such as churches, the Y's, the Scouts, and settlement houses have opened their camp gates to both campers and counsellors of all races, creeds, and colors. The private camps, sensitive to parental prejudice and consequent economic pressures, have moved more slowly in this direction but there are a number of fine interfaith and interracial camps under private auspices.

Some parents aren't ready for such an experience for their children. But for those who are, the contribution of a good interfaith, interracial camp to the development of understanding relationships is potentially great.

religious observation in camps

Quite understandably, most parents are concerned about the religious atmosphere of any camp to which they send their children. One finds of course, some camps where religion is the major emphasis. For those of orthodox Jewish faith there are camps in which all food is kosher and the religious rituals are scrupulously observed. Several Roman Catholic organizations also run camps in which religious observance is given priority. In such camps a staff chaplain is usually responsible for conducting religious services and for supervising other religious observance. Certain Protestant churches sponsor camps primarily for children belonging to their particular denomination. Daily worship services and vespers are usually held in addition to the Sunday services.

By far the largest number of camps, however, are unrelated to any one religious group. Sunday services are held which will appeal to children of different religious backgrounds. Efforts are made to help children experience religious feeling without having this tied to a particular faith or denomination. In such camps arrangements are usually made to transport Catholic children to the nearest church for Mass.

If you feel strongly that you want your child to maintain close contact with the specific faith in which he has been raised, then, of course, one of the first things to look for in the selection of a camp is the religious auspices under which it is conducted. You may wish, too, to be sure that services which are recognizably like those to which he has been used are held.

For those who would want their children to participate in religious observation but would welcome a nondenominational and even interfaith approach, a brief word characterizing such services may be in order. As is true of other aspects of the camp program, religious

services differ greatly from camp to camp. But for the most part one would find that Sunday services are held in an outdoor spot chosen for its quiet and beauty. The services consist of music from a portable organ, a camp choir (if there be one), and sometimes recorded music that is appropriate, together with a simple talk regarding one's relationships to his fellows or devoted to some ethical problem, given by the director or one of the staff. Prayers particularly suited to the out-of-doors will be offered. On occasion, there may be a sunrise service at some nearby point of vantage. Or the youngsters may meet in the center of a lake in rowboats and canoes for the brief service.

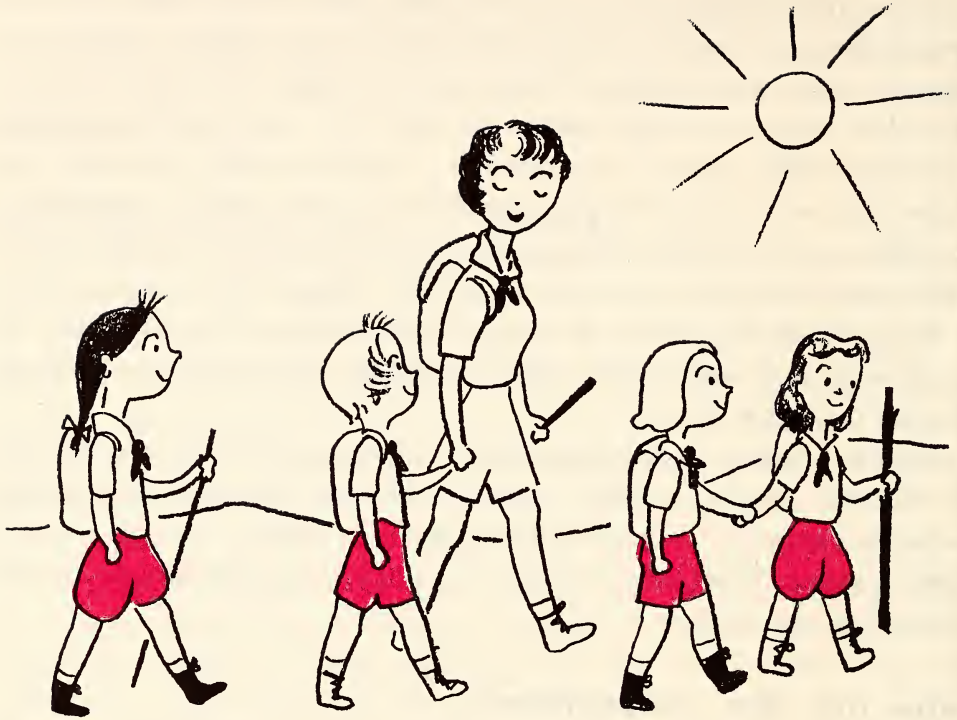
In many camps, too, vesper cabin services are held each evening. These may consist of Bible stories, of discussions of relationships between campers, of brief talks by the counsellor, and of a good-night prayer. Their effectiveness, of course, depends largely on the individual counsellor.

who are the counsellors?

Perhaps the most important question that can be asked about a camp is also one of the most difficult ones as far as obtaining a satisfactory answer is concerned. That question is, "Who are the counsellors?"

As is true in schools, the people who live and work most closely with the children are far more important than are some of the factors about which we have been talking. A camp may have a fairly stereotyped and regimented program but if the counsellors are individuals who like children, are understanding of them and try to see that the camp experience is a good one for them, then we parents can overlook some things we may not like about the program and be confident that our youngsters will have a profitable experience. Similarly, a fine sounding program that is staffed by incompetent, inexperienced, and uninterested counsellors is worth very little.

It cannot be overemphasized that the quality of the counsellors is central in determining the strength or weakness of a camp. Yet it is not easy to describe in words what it is that makes a good counsellor. It is easier, usually, to say what counsellors should not be.



Most camp people agree that there should be at least one counsellor for every eight children and that the bulk of the counsellors should be at least nineteen or twenty years of age. They should be either college students or graduates trained in educational methods and the knowledge of child development. One should check on the ratio of junior or assistant counsellors. If the junior counselling group is large in comparison to the senior counsellors, it means that the former group will have to undertake responsibilities beyond their years and abilities.

Counsellors should not be hired because they bring a "following" but for their counselling ability and experience. In the past it was far more common than today for directors to seek out as counsellors, men and women who were able to recruit a group of campers in their own home towns. In many instances, the fact that they were able to "sell" the idea of camp had little to do with their qualifications as counsellors.

Counsellors should not be hired primarily because of their skill in some athletic activity. Again, the fact that a man is captain of his college football team or that a woman is a champion tennis player does not necessarily qualify him or her to work with children. A camp with too large a variety of specialized fancy activities is apt to hire a specialized staff instead of all-around camp counsellors.

A discussion with the camp director as to the procedures he uses in selecting counsellors may be revealing. If he gives evidence that he concerns himself with attitudes expressed toward children, with the nature of their past experience with children, and with the prospective counsellor's ideas as to what he would do in meeting common camp situations, the director is at least looking for the important things.

Another indication of the importance the director places on the part counsellors play in providing a good camping experience for children is the interest he has in preparing them for their jobs. It is a hopeful sign if there are both pre-camp and in-camp training sessions in which the staff works together to develop that sort of understanding of children and their needs which will mean that the counsellor-camper relationship is better than it otherwise might be.

and who is the director?

In the last analysis it is the camp director who not only sets the general and specific policies of the camp but also selects the staff that is to work with him. For though there may be some factors outside the director's control as he hires counsellors, he usually gets the kind of people he is looking for. If he wants co-workers, people to whose ideas he will listen and with whom he will work as a partner, one can be reasonably certain that the camp atmosphere will be a healthy, creative one. If, on the other hand, he looks for "yes" men, for technicians only, for people whose services he can buy as cheaply as possible, a very different tone will be set.

Directing a summer camp effectively calls for a considerable variety of skills and personnel qualifications. Among these are business and administrative skills. But more important in your

selection of a camp (and a camp director) are other qualities. Do parents whose children have gone to his camp like him? How much understanding of children does he seem to have? Do you feel you can count on him to be straightforward and honest in talking about his ideas and his camp, or is there a feeling that he is always "selling" something? Satisfactory answers to these questions while not completely conclusive, should give one a fair basis on which to decide.

By and large, the men and women who are directing summer camps in the United States are a fine bunch of people. But they are human and not all can be expected to "have what it takes" to run the sort of camp in which you would wish to have your son or daughter. It is most important that you get as concrete a picture as possible of this key person in the camp set-up and let much of your decision rest on your opinion of him.

further inquiries

Many of the matters into which we have taken a brief glance are the more intangible ones. As such they are the most important. But it is well, too, for the inquiring parent to do a little checking on certain physical aspects of camps he is considering. Let us look, briefly, then at a few of the more important.

sanitation, health, and safety

Fortunately, in most states there is rather careful inspection and supervision of the sanitary facilities of camps. One can usually feel assured that minimum sanitary standards are being met if there is this sort of inspection in your state. The important things not always regulated by the state may be listed briefly.

1. Provision of sanitary toilet facilities in sufficient number and within reasonable distance. It has been suggested that there should be at least one toilet for each ten campers and that these be located not more than 150 feet from the living unit using them.

2. Hot baths or showers. Though cleanliness can be maintained without regular hot showers or baths, it is not easy. For younger children, particularly, they seem desirable. If, however, it can be

shown that supervised bathing in a lake or stream is a regular practice, this may be satisfactory.

Medical practices are also state regulated to some extent. Here again, however, there can be much variation. At a minimum it seems reasonable to expect:

1. A place where the youngster who needs it can have quiet, rest, and proper medical attention. Buildings used as infirmaries are greatly different one from another. While one cannot expect a camp infirmary to be comparable to a city hospital, it should be attractive, quiet, and otherwise conducive to rest for the slightly ill child.

2. A resident nurse or doctor. Most camps have a nurse in residence and a nearby doctor on immediate call. Some camps use young graduate doctors but these are very difficult to secure and often have not had the range of experience desirable in camp medical service. Arrangements should be made for admission to the nearest adequate hospital in cases of more serious illness or accident.

The matter of safety is one around which there are major differences of opinion. Some camp directors do not permit the climbing of trees lest a child fall. Others carefully smooth out the slightest rough spot in camp paths. These and comparable practices seem unnecessarily cautious. But there are some things which are essential, such as the care with which the use of the waterfront is supervised, protection against unnecessary hazards such as major highways, railroad tracks, broken glass, and unduly rough paths.

food

Few things are more important to the happiness of children and adults than an adequate amount of tasty and well-balanced food. Most camp directors are well aware of this and give high priority to their food services. Not only do they provide adequacy and tastiness, but most make use of the services of a well-trained dietitian who sees to it that the food meets the nutritional needs of children. There are, of course, camps which have very adequate food service even though there is no nutritionist on the staff. In such instances a more careful check on menus of past summers would seem to be

indicated so that one can rest assured that even without professional supervision, the food is satisfactory.

Most states require health examinations for any who handle food in camps. One may well check to see that there are such regulations in your state.

housing

The kind of structures in which campers live is not so important as how well they are constructed and maintained. Well-maintained tents for instance, with properly built floors raised off the ground can be just as satisfactory and a lot more fun for the youngsters than cabins. It is true, however, that most organized camps hesitate to use tents because of their appearance of insubstantiality.

The housing units, of whatever type, should be located so that they are exposed to the sun several hours each day.

costs

Camp fees range up to as much as \$1,000 for the summer. Most private camps fall within a range of from \$400 to \$600 though some are less and others considerably more. In organizational camps such as those conducted by the Y's, the range is from \$15 to \$45 a week depending on the type of camp equipment and the amount of subsidy provided by the organization. It is also well to check on the number of special fees. Transportation to and from camp, uniforms, laundry, craft materials, out-of-camp trips, and riding are often charged for in addition to the regular camp fee.

While there may be a very rough relationship between camp fee and excellence of facilities, program, and leadership, it is so rough as not to be very useful. One cannot count on the fact that the fee is high or low as an indication of the quality of the camp.

attitudes toward parent visits

Camp directors differ somewhat in the attitude they take toward visitors. Quite understandably, most of them are not anxious to have you spend your vacation at the camp (unless they run an adult



camp for profit on the side). But whether or not they see the value of parent visits to children periodically is something of an indication of their understanding of children's and parents' needs. Increasingly, as compared with twenty-five years ago, parents are welcomed at camp. Indeed, some camp people feel that it is impossible to understand and work effectively with a child unless they can get some picture of the attitudes and relationships that exist between him and his parents. And what better way than to see them together, preferably playing, working, and eating together.

one last word

For lack of space, a number of things have not been touched upon. As you explore the possibility of various camps for your child, matters other than those discussed here will come to your attention. In all probability, however, they will fit somewhere or other into those areas which have been discussed.

This business of selecting a camp should be no haphazard thing. The thoroughness with which you go into it may make all the difference between a fine experience for your boy or girl or one that

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he would much rather have done without. In seeking to get an adequate picture of the camp you are considering, it would be most desirable to see it in operation the season prior to the one you are considering. This, of course, is difficult and often not feasible. But if, through the eyes of the director, through those of parents whose children have recently been enrolled, and through some of the children themselves, you feel you have gotten a fairly adequate picture, you can probably assume that your young man or woman will find camp "swell." Indeed, in the last analysis, this is *the* most important thing—that the camper enjoy himself, have fun.

It probably isn't true that 99 and 44/100 per cent of the children who go to camp enjoy it immensely, but the proportion is very high. The American summer camp not only provides a fine time for its clientele but has truly come of age as a part of our educational system. It deserves the serious consideration of all parents.

CAMP CHECKLIST

- 1. Is your child ready for camp experience?**
- 2. Is the camp a general or a specialized one? Is the program highly organized or informal?**
- 3. Is the camp program varied, well-balanced, and flexible to fit your child's needs.**
- 4. If a specialized camp, does it offer the kind of program most suitable for your child?**
- 5. Are there enough well-trained, well-rounded counsellors?**
- 6. Do you have confidence in the director's experience, educational views, and abilities?**
- 7. Are the sanitary and health facilities adequate?**
- 8. Is the food nutritious and tasty?**
- 9. Is there adequate provision for medical attention?**
- 10. Are its housing facilities adequate and attractive?**
- 11. Are the costs reasonable for the services provided?**
- 12. Is the camp a happy place? Do the campers want to return?**

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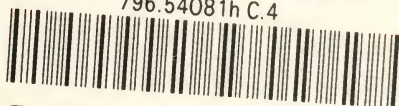
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